1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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As has already appeared it is impossible to live and work in Malta without becoming very much aware of the strength of the Church. We venture therefore to make some necessary comment on this at once most delicate and yet most vigorous aspect of Maltese affairs. 175 79

As noted in Chapter IV, religious activity of a highly developed and institutionalised nature was a feature of Malta even in prehistory. Little direct evidence is available of this facet of life in the semitic or classical cultures, and even when we come to the Christian era and St. Paul's shipwreck 'on an island called Melita' we have no conclusive evidence that this in fact was Malta, or that St. Paul introduced Christianity to the Islands (18).

At all events the Christian Church entered the Islands in Roman times, and the line of bishops regarded as beginning with Publius, St. Paul's host, although broken during the period of Arab rule, was re-established by the Normans. As examined in Chapter IV, from this time onward Malta became first a simple fief in Christendom and then its bastion, held by a Religious Order. Whatever toleration there may once have been between Christian and Moslem before 1530 was quickly erased.

The report by the Apostolic Visitor, Mgr. Pietro Duzina (19) of his visit to Malta in 1575 throws some light on the condition of the Church at the time. In answer to unorthodoxy a Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition was established, creating three rival forces in the Islands, the Grand Master, the Inquisitor and the Bishop. From Duzina's report and subsequent accounts we see that not until the Turkish threat in 1565 had been repulsed and the Visitor's instructions for future conduct had had some effect, did village life become centred around new and magnificent churches which replaced the smaller more humble edifices in the hamlets. Curia and architectural evidence (20) corroborate each other. From this time onward, the parishes, growing in number, became the administrative and social regional units that counted in Maltese life and the Parish Church became the focus of the religious, social, and economic life of the casals and villages. As patrons of all the arts, repositories of wealth, directors not only of consciences but all conscious action, the Parish organisations became, and to an amazing extent still retain, a permeating power. Quite apart from the regular clergy the Religious Orders have played an important part in the Maltese Church and in education and other aspects of social activity. The relationship between the Church and the Order of St. John was not always completely amicable. In the traditional village scene the village priest, in the virtual absence of an indigenous squirearchy, was the teacher, doctor, legal advisor as well as spiritual mentor. Compared with this the Knights were alien and apart from Maltese life. The position of the Church and the Order vis-a-vis the Papacy was also not completely easy. Nevertheless, mainly as a result of mutual non-interference, the Church gained complete local ascendancy.

During the nineteenth century an uneasy *modus vivendi* was established between the Church and the new non-Catholic rulers, and during most of the conflict over language and culture the Church played a pacific and calming role, concerning itself mainly with the administrative details necessitated by the rapidly increasing and nucleating population. How far the dependence of the individual on the spirit and dogma of his belief, the faith described in 1840 by Miège (21) as '*cette piété poussé jusqu'au fanatisme*', has been supported by the long years of insecurity during which Divine and ecclesiastical protection was felt as a real and precious thing, it is hard to say. One may speculate on the fact that it was at the old 'frontier' casal at Mosta, westernmost of the old settlements, that local piety built in days of security the vast church with a dome that ranks among the largest of the world. It is also true that the Maltese Church enforces more strict rules of conduct upon its people than other Churches now find possible.

However we may interpret the situation, the Church which succeeded in adjusting itself to nineteenth century changes has been faced in the twentieth with the consequences of those changes. The traditional society in which it was virtually omnipotent and omnipresent is changing into a new society in which the individual does not have to lean so much on the priest. Now, the younger genera- 178 79

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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178 tion can read, travel and make contact directly and vicariously with the world
99 outside. Emigration too has tested the strength of the Faith. In consequence, we can now find in Malta a historical cross-section represented in spatial distribution. At one extreme one can meet in Sliema agnostic Maltese who never go near a church; at the other, in rural Gozo, one can find general obedience to the Bishop's instructions. All societies are heterogeneous in this respect but in Malta the strain of division within society is particularly great because of the existence of so many other cleavages. The reaction of the Church to this new situation has been dual in character. In the first place the Church itself has taken official action. Reform and correction, the imposition of rigorous film and book censorship, the series of edicts on dress and on behaviour have accompanied research, such as that of Abbé Houtart (22), into the needs of the people. Secondly, there have appeared the lay organisations with the avowed intent of redressing the balance. M.U.S.E.U.M. and Catholic Action before World War II, Cana, Legion of Mary, Social Action, the Holy Name Society and many others of foreign and indigenous origin since 1945 have developed in the conurbation where the challenge to the Church was strongest (23).

Financially the Church is still strong, owning as it does some 19 per cent. of the agricultural land of the Islands and an unverifiable total of urban property (24). Politically, the strength of the Church rests on its hold over the minds and hearts of the people. It is not necessary for the Church to take much overt action to demonstrate its power.

178 As a last vignette of the changing Maltese socio-economic complex we may
256 consider some aspects of recent research on a useful indicator of social change,
655 the bread baking industry (25).
722 The purchasing, distribution and processing of wheat and wheat flour, remains as it has been for centuries, Government controlled. When the Knights established their capital at Valletta and when the suburb-outwork of Floriana was built, great stone-chamber granaries were hewn out of the solid rock, developed versions of the much older 'bell-pits'. These underground granaries were stocked by the official organisation, the *Università*, and the grain periodically distributed at controlled prices. This siege-system, necessitated by dependence on imports, was abolished in the early nineteenth century, and the newly established Board of Trade contented itself with licensing importations. As a measure of agricultural protection and for the raising of revenue, duties were levied on these shipments. During the twentieth century, and culminating in the emergency measures of the beleaguered Islands during World War II, controls became tighter and grain prices heavily subsidised.

178 During the period of urbanisation and more especially during the last siege
256 the general practice of home baking rapidly declined in Malta, although in Gozo it still persists. In the latter island there was in 1957 only one full-time and one part-time commercial bakery, while in Malta there were 201. All food grains produced for sale in the Island should legally be sent to licensed flour mills for blending. Imports, almost entirely of hard Canadian grain, are made by the Department of Trade and by the Victualling Yard in H.M. Dockyard. Ninety-seven per cent. of all flour issued for ration-bread making is subsidised, but local estimates suggest that up to 50 per cent. is used for making other products, this illegally used flour being sold at a discount.

100 Fig. 67 shows the distribution of bakeries in Malta, their importance and
178 the main distribution areas as they existed in 1957. Only two villages in 1950
256 and one in 1957 - Safi - did not possess their own bakeries. This however is not indicative of closed fields of distribution but only of the multiplicity and the small-scale of the enterprises. Of the 35 districts, 32 imported bread from and 17 exported bread to other areas. Over half the 15,000 bags of subsidised flour issued in 1950 eventually found their way as bread outside the receiving districts. Of this inter-regional trade, Qormi supplied almost 80 per cent. Very briefly the points of interest are as follows. Qormi, which in 1957 had 48 bakeries, has always been the traditional baking centre, partly because of its central situation, but mainly as noted in Chapter VIII because of its situation in

[See p. 198 --Analyst]

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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621 794 795 move for religious feasts and family celebrations. Sometimes a number of these farms are clustered around a chapel or small church dependent upon the parish church. In time, these hamlets may disappear; historical sources cite many which have long since vanished.[1] On the other hand, a hamlet may grow to the point where its inhabitants can afford to build a larger church and in other ways successfully press their claim to become a separate parish. Most rural parishes in Malta and Gozo have come into being in this way. Some towns have been divided into two or more parishes for administrative reasons. In Malta, Qormi and Valletta are each divided into two parishes, and Sliema into three. [578] Rabat in Gozo is currently being divided into two parishes. But because of fierce rivalry between the residents of the territories concerned, the exact boundary line is disputed and the territorial division will probably take another generation to complete.

79 The parish priest, who in all but the smallest parishes is assisted by a curate or more, is responsible to the Church for the care of [609] the souls of all Catholics resident in his parish. Except where foreign service personnel live with their families – notably in Rabat, Naxxar, Mosta, St. Paul's Bay, Luqa and Birżebbuġa – all villagers are Catholic, and are thus the priest's parishioners. These parishioners also form part of the corporate body of the Church.

793 The clergy in Malta, as in all other Catholic countries, are divided into two main groups: the secular or diocesan clergy, and the regular clergy. Diocesan priests are trained in the Bishop's Seminary and are directly subject to the authority of the Bishop. A further distinction is made between those diocesan priests whose families or patrons have been able to provide them with a benefice – either property or cash deposited at the Curia bank – yielding a minimum of £10 annually, and those who have received their benefices from their Bishop. After the first five years the former, who are by far the most numerous, are free to serve where they wish. The latter always remain at the service of their Bishop. Most parishes are run by diocesan priests, and the clergy [792] resident in the villages belong to this group. The friars and monks of the regular clergy are members of religious orders. They have been trained in the seminaries and houses of their particular orders.

[1] An interesting study of villages which have disappeared is given in M. Richardson, *Aspects of the Demography of Modern Malta* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1960), pp. 243 ff.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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794 distinctive habit of the confraternity in processions, in which the
[242] *fratelli* play an important part. Entrance to a confraternity is by means of a short religious ceremony and the payment of a small fee. This entitles the newly professed member to share in the indulgences, privileges and spiritual favours which have accrued to the society.

Every confraternity is established independently in each parish, and has nothing to do with confraternities of the same name in other villages. Before the band clubs were established, confraternities were the only formally constituted associations in rural
[554] parishes. Their officers enjoyed considerable prestige, and had a
[178] voice in village affairs. But today the members seldom meet as a group and most confraternities have no premises of their own, though they generally have an altar in the parish church. Aside from the dozen or two who take part in all the parish processions, members take no part in any activity. A few confraternities
[423] which own property are a notable exception. Their officers meet occasionally to discuss the business affairs of the confraternity, and the societies still play an active role in local affairs.

There are also a number of third orders. These societies are lay counterparts of certain religious orders. They are organized in much the same way as the confraternities. Members attend occasional spiritual exercises and have the right to take part in processions and to be buried in the habit of the order. Altogether there are 16 different confraternities and third orders. Among the most common are the confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament, which is established in all parishes, the Holy Rosary, Our Lady of Consolation (*Ta' Cintura*), St. Joseph and the Third Orders of the Franciscans and the Carmelites.

554 All groups and individuals that are tied to the Church are
● 79 ranked. Each parish, religious order and parish society has its fixed position in the overall order. The same applies to the clerics who constitute its personnel. Position in the hierarchy is determined by seniority of foundation in the case of parishes and associations – or date of ordination or appointment to present office, in the case of the clergy – in combination with certain marks of honour conferred by the Church authorities. Such honours carry with them a claim to higher precedence than seniority by itself would give. For example, any parish in which there is a Collegiate Chapter, or whose church has the title of Basilica, ranks higher than one

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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which does not have these honours. Other honours are the right to perform rituals, indulgence to persons visiting the church, and particular ecclesiastical offices. To a considerable extent these are rewards for meritorious conduct, measured by contributions to the decorations of the church, or the number of vocations, or special devotions performed in a parish.

During certain religious processions and ceremonies this ranking becomes an important determinant of the order in which the participants take part. Formerly, during the annual St. Gregory procession, virtually the entire hierarchy of Malta could be seen lined up on the ground. But this procession of parishes was abolished and the ceremony modified in 1927, among other reasons because of a dispute between the Canons of Senglea and Birkirkara over a question of precedence. But the St. Gregory procession in Gozo is still held every March. Then it is possible to see parish following parish in order of precedence, and the confraternities of each, in their turn, ranked according to their position in their own parish hierarchy. At the front of the procession is the youngest parish, the one with the lowest rank. It is followed by parishes in ascending order of seniority until the oldest Collegiate Chapter. Then come the religious orders. These are followed by the clergy of the Cathedral and the Monsignori of the Cathedral Chapter. The celebrant or Bishop brings up the end of the procession. This inverted order of precedence is an important organizational principle, which operates in the secular as well as the religious sphere, and it is one of the basic causes of disputes between villages and band clubs.

III

At present there are six political parties in Malta. Of these, only three contested the 1955 elections: the Nationalist Party (NP), led by Dr. Giorgio Borg Olivier; the Malta Labour Party (MLP), whose leader is Dom Mintoff; and Miss Mabel Strickland's Progressive Constitutional Party (PCP). The election resulted in 23 seats for the MLP, 17 for the NP and none for the PCP. Three new parties have emerged since the resignation from office of the MLP in 1958: the Democratic Nationalist Party (DNP), led by Dr. Herbert Ganado, split from the Nationalist Party; Anthony Pellegrini, a former Secretary of the Labour Party, founded the

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In addition to the sums which the parish priest spent on fireworks, another £472 was collected by six groups of enthusiasts and spent on raw materials for the fireworks which they manufactured. The total cost to the village was thus £1,212. In all respects this was an average festa for a village of 5,000.

The festa in Kortin has not always been controlled by the parish priest. Dun Bert, the present incumbent, had something of a struggle to seize and hold the reins of authority. Until he took over the parish eight years ago the external festa had been run by a committee. Though the parish priest was *ex officio* head of this committee, the actual affairs of the committee were run by old Manwel and the father of the curate, who was general manager of the festa for over thirty years. The committee also included the latter's wife's father and brother in its membership. His brother was killed twenty-five years ago in an explosion which wrecked the village's officially licensed firework factory and killed four others. This committee used to book the bands, repaint, erect and store the decorations and collect all the funds for the external feast. One of its major responsibilities was to run the two large fund-raising fairs which were held every year in the school. Next to the festa, these fairs were the favourite amusement of the village. Thus when Dun Bert arrived in Kortin, he found his was only a nominal role as far as the external festa was concerned. As he is a man who likes to run things his own way, the arrangement did not suit him. Moreover, he was concerned with the financial position of the parish, and in particular with the interest on the £3,000 that his predecessor had borrowed from the Curia to help finance the unfinished parish hall. To be able to meet all the parish's financial commitments, he felt that he had to have control of all its financial resources. The first year, however, he did very little about it.

During his second year in Kortin, the newly elected Labour Government came to his assistance, albeit unwittingly. The new Minister of Education refused permission to the organizers of the Kortin festa to hold a public fair in the school. This deprived the organizers of their major source of income, and threatened the festa. Dun Bert quickly took over the financial management of the festa and made two house-to-house collections. These raised the necessary funds and saved the festa. He then gave to the Sodality of Our Lady the responsibility of collecting threepence a week from each household. But for six months of the year these

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contributions would be used for the general needs of the church. The festa committee was dismissed.

The following year he ran the festa himself. It was quite a success, although there was some grumbling that there was not the same spirit in the festa as before. But following the festa the year after that, the grumblers became more vocal and began to take action. Their main criticism was that without the committee to whip up enthusiasm for the festa, the village was becoming apathetic about its celebration. Moreover, with no committee there was no one to paint and care for the festa furnishings – which they considered to be the finest in Malta, if not the world – and they would soon be spoiled. Consequently, a few days after the festa, the ringleaders gathered in the football club and formed a committee with Sur Gorġ, the president of the Social Club, as chairman. Sur Gorġ,[1] a wealthy middle-aged bachelor, is the last descendant in the village of a family which has played a leading role in the community for almost a century. The committee was composed of members of the band club, the social club and the football club. Representatives then went to Dun Bert and told him that many people wished to have the old festa committee restored, with the power of raising funds. They also suggested that this committee should control the collection of threepence a week. Dun Bert replied that while he was not opposed in principle to the idea of such a committee, he would have to consider it. In any event, he could not approve of their financial proposals. When the spokesman told him that a committee was already in existence and working for the good of the village, he became somewhat alarmed. The following Sunday he defended his position before the village from the altar, citing relevant portions of Canon Law and describing the parish's financial situation.

Sur Gorġ's group then distributed leaflets to each house asking for a vote of confidence. This divided the village into two factions, for there were many who would not consider going against the wishes of their spiritual shepherd, no matter what their views on the festa were. Dun Bert eventually agreed to the formation of a parish council, to comprise two representatives from

[1] The title *sur* (from *sinjur*, sir, gentleman) is a mark of respect bestowed by villagers upon all educated outsiders who have no other title. It also marks social distance. Very few persons are addressed this way by their fellow villagers. Sur Gorġ, though born in Kerlin, was addressed this way because of his high social status and university education.

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each association, including the religious ones.[1] The committee forwarded the names of the representatives of its three constituent clubs to Dun Bert. After some time, when they had received no reply from him, they wrote to the Archbishop. Finally, some two months later, Dun Bert wrote back that he could not accept any member of a political party committee on the parish council. This was clearly aimed at the secretary of the band club, who was a very active member of the Labour Party committee, the only political committee in the village. He was not willing to step down, and the other members of the committee supported his decision. The rest of the village slowly lost interest in the matter. The parish priest thus had his way, and is still in full control of the feast.

Many are still bitter about the manner in which their request to take a more active part in the organization of their feast was suppressed, but most have accepted it. They miss not so much the old festa committee, the members of which most people criticized freely, as the feeling they had had of all working together for the greater glory of the village. The members of the old committee at least had the virtue of being from the village, and were as anxious as the next person to celebrate the biggest and best feast in Malta, or so I was often told. Although no one suggested that the parish priest is anything but scrupulously honest, they consider that as an outsider, he does not have the same keen interest in their feast, and in the reputation of the village. Others, less charitable, accuse him of being hungry for power and anxious to enrich himself with his fees as procurator of the festa. Many also spoke to me with regret of the passing of the annual fairs, which the parish priest has not attempted to run on his own. The fairs were exciting occasions on which young and old, rich and poor, competed against each other in games of chance and raffles to win back the rabbits and chickens which they had previously donated to the festa. They say they miss the sense of unity that the fairs brought them. 'In those days we knew each other better,' one priest remarked. 'With the fair some of the poetry of the village was destroyed.' Perhaps, without expressing it in quite this fashion, the organizers of the committee, in their own way, were also seeking this lost poetry.

[1] Such parish councils have from time to time been established in some of the larger villages and towns, but most of them came to threaten the authority of the parish priests, who therefore disbanded them.

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III

A previous chapter set out the hierarchical organization of the Church. It was observed that rank was determined by seniority in combination with certain marks of honour conferred by ecclesiastical authorities in recognition of merit. Besides rank, these honours often bestow the right to certain external signs, which are much prized. The many religious processions and ceremonies provide occasions on which parishes can display their symbols of rank to outsiders. For example, the Canons of a Collegiate church wear distinctive ceremonial robes, and are permitted to carry a huge silver mace in processions as a sign of their church's rank. They add a great deal of colour and pageantry to the religious processions in which they are invited to participate. An old man once described Collegiate churches to me as 'the ornament of all other parish churches', and added, 'where there are no Canons, there is nothing in a procession.' The clergy of a church which has received the title of Basilica may carry in procession a huge red and gold damask umbrella. They are also permitted to carry a bell, to wear gold buckles on their shoes and, on certain occasions, to say Mass facing the congregation. As with the title Collegiate, the title Basilica can only be bestowed upon a church by Papal sanction. In Malta it has been given only to the Collegiate churches of Senglea and Birkirkara, to the churches of Mt. Carmel and St. Dominic in Valletta, and in Gozo to that of St. George in Rabat.

The bestowal of honours is not in fact determined by merit alone. In view of their importance as symbols of excellence, they become counters in the competition between parishes and between parish associations. Their acquisition is thus a matter of great concern to the entire community, and often becomes the subject of political action. That is, persons and groups try to influence those who make the decisions in relation to their bestowal. Through their network of personal relations, leading village figures, including the priests, try to influence the Bishop and the monsignori who surround him. They also bargain with these authorities, and if an unfavourable decision is handed down, they may resort to an open show of disrespect towards the Bishop – by smashing his coat of arms, for example – to signal their dissatisfaction and so attempt to force him to reconsider their

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79 626 628 664

claim. The final decision is thus made in response to a great many pressures. The honour usually goes to the contender who can present the best case and apply the strongest pressure. This is normally the largest and most influential of the groups competing for the honour. Thus the number and degree of honours bestowed on any group are roughly equal to its social importance to the community of which it forms part.

The current dispute in Gozo over the bestowal of the title of Basilica on the church of St. George provides an excellent illustration of the length to which the pursuit of such honours may be carried. For many years the Collegiate Chapters of Nadur and Xaghra unsuccessfully sought to obtain this title for their respective churches. During that time the Bishop had been able to avoid having to commit himself. In Nadur many believed that their church would be the next in Gozo to become a Basilica as a compensation for certain privileges which were modified some thirty years ago. The people of Xaghra, for their part, were also under the impression that their church would become the first Basilica in Gozo.

The claims of Nadur and Xaghra were not the only ones. There was also that of the new parish which the Bishop had created around the church of St. George in Rabat. Many argued that this new parish should take the lowest position in the diocesan table of precedence. But the new parish was located in the island's capital, and many of Gozo's most influential citizens had been instrumental in bringing about its creation. Moreover, the church of St. George was one of the oldest in the diocese. In brief, the thought of their parish having an inferior rank to that of the small rural parish of Munxar, hitherto the lowest-ranking parish, was distasteful to the townsmen. As a Basilica the church of St. George could take precedence over all other parishes and occupy a place immediately before the Collegiate Chapters. The partisans of St. George were in an excellent position to make their voices heard in the Curia, and late in 1958 the title was formally bestowed upon their church. The people of Nadur and Xaghra, led by their disappointed Canons, reacted with great vigour. The abuse and violent action that resulted were as insulting to the Bishop as anything that the Labour Party has been accused of directing at him or at the Archbishop of Malta.

Nadur and Xaghra all but severed relations with the Curia.

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Both boycotted the annual festa of St. George, and in 1961 some hot-heads in Xagħra even erected a road block to prevent cars from the village going to Rabat. The people of Nadur refused to celebrate their own festa, or to take part in the St. Gregory procession. They also refused to allow the Bishop to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in their parish. In Xagħra someone exploded a bomb on the roof of the Archpriest's house because many considered that he, an outsider, had not worked hard enough to secure the Basilica. In 1960 Xagħra celebrated only the internal festa, and even that was not without incident. Shortly before the festa, the Bishop received an anonymous letter accusing him of being an enemy of the village. Later, when he visited the village to assist at the High Mass, he was given a hostile reception. Then it was discovered that part of the throne that he was to sit on during the service was missing. Furious at these insults, he issued formal interdicts against the person or persons unknown who had written the anonymous letter and 'stolen' his throne.

To date the dispute has not been settled. The people of Nadur and Xagħra both say that peace cannot be restored until they receive some other honour to compensate them for the lost Basilica. To back up their claims, they have each spent tens of thousands of pounds during the past few years decorating their respective churches. In Nadur the new marble pulpit cost almost £5,000, and the work of covering the walls with marble may cost as much as £20,000 before it is completed.

This type of dispute, however, is not limited to Malta's sister island. The Collegiate Chapters of Birkirkara, Senglea and St. Paul's Shipwreck in Valletta have similar unresolved conflicts over precedence, and they refuse to take part in processions together. But not all their disputes are limited to matters of precedence. In 1949 the people of Birkirkara smashed the Archbishop's coat of arms and heaped rubble in the main door of their church, thereby symbolically denying him entrance. They were protesting because the Archbishop had abolished, among others, the right of the Chapter to choose as Canons only those priests born and baptized in Birkirkara. The Holy See was able to resolve the dispute, and a few years later it bestowed the title of Basilica on the town's church.

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besides the patron saint, parishes celebrate many other saints. The feasts of these secondary saints are normally not as lavish as the annual festa of the patron. But many villages celebrate two large festas: one for the titular saint of the parish, and the other for a secondary saint who has assumed almost equal social importance. Where this occurs, a village is divided into two partiti, each of which has its own band club and celebrates one of the saints. The partiti compete over almost every aspect of the festa, including the decoration of the streets, the adornment of the statue, the number of guest bands and, above all, the fireworks. Even the exact number of communicants, the size of candles and the quantity of light bulbs illuminating the façade of the church often become the subject of dispute. Farrug is divided by this type of rivalry. One partit is dedicated to St. Martin, the titular of the parish, the other to St. Roque.

The origins of these festa partiti, where they can be traced, are very much alike. Most of them came into existence sometime between 1850 and the turn of the century, and most arose out of disputes between persons concerned with the celebration of the titular festa and those interested in the cult of some lesser saint. The latter were usually members of the confraternity dedicated to that saint.[1] These factions in time became centred on separate social clubs, and eventually acquired brass bands. The clubs provided a permanent institutional basis for the rivalry. As time went on, the partiti became more violent in their disputes and in the pressure they put upon individuals to support them. Finally in 1935, the Church, long alarmed at the extremes to which the devotion to some saints had been carried in certain villages, took steps to eliminate the competition. It promulgated a series of regulations designed to reduce the scale on which secondary feasts could be celebrated. These stipulated that for secondary feasts there was to be no Translation of Holy Relics on the eve of the feast, that only the church and the area immediately adjacent to it could

[1] Cf. Rob. Mifsud Bonnici, *Ġrajja Tal-Mużiċa F'Malta u Għawdex* (Malta, Giov. Muscat, 1934), pp. 38 f. He suggests that these partiti developed out of a dispute between persons who wanted to play sacred music by the Maltese composer Vincenzo Bugeja (1806-60) and those who preferred that of his rival, Paolo Nani (1814-1964). As far as I could determine, however, the only partiti which arose directly out of this dispute are those in Żebbuġ. On the other hand, many rival partiti, once established, played the music of either Bugeja or Nani during their feasts. The former took a star as their symbol, the latter an eagle. Today partiti in many villages are still nicknamed either *tal-istilla* or *tal-ajkla* after this once-important division.

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be illuminated and that only one band on the eve and one on the day of the feast would be allowed. Although they are now ignored, the regulations also placed limits upon the variety, quantity and duration of firework displays. Finally, they drew attention to the already existing regulations that church decorations and new works of art introduced for secondary feasts should be less costly and beautiful than those for titular feasts.[1]

Parish priests were expected to insist on the observance of these regulations, and they succeeded so well that some secondary feasts were reduced to minor celebrations. Moreover, the *pika* between the partiti in Żabbar and Qrendi was so violent that the secondary feasts there were suppressed completely.[2] This served as a stern warning to others.

II

The story of the origin and development of the festa partiti in Farrug is in many respects similar to the accounts which I collected about festa partiti in other villages. It might, therefore, be helpful to examine it in some detail. Before 1877 there were no festa partiti in the village; everyone co-operated in the celebration of the feast of St. Martin, the patron of the parish. By all accounts it was a humble one, and lasted only one day. This period is described as an idyllic time during which the village was happy and united. But in 1876 a new parish priest arrived, and after that the scene began to change. Dun Rokku, the new priest, not only had a strong personal devotion to the saint after whom he had been named, but he was also from a village where there was a strong secondary partit devoted to St. Roque. Within a year he established a confraternity dedicated to St. Roque in order to 'inject some more life into this rural parish', according to the president of the St. Roque Band Club. The first feast in honour of St. Roque was celebrated in October 1878 to mark the establishment of the confraternity. Although the new secondary feast was at first a simple affair, it and the titular feast grew during the next few years.

[1] Concilium Regionale Melitense (1935), *Decreta* (Malta, Empire Press, 1936), p. 91.

[2] In Żabbar the devotion to St. Michael, the secondary patron, died out almost completely, though the *pika* between the bands has persisted. But in Qrendi the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes, the secondary patron, has continued as strong as ever. In 1938 the Archbishop reinstated the confraternity dedicated to her, which his predecessor suppressed in 1935, but the partit band is still not allowed to play for her feast.

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few years. In 1880 the new confraternity dedicated an altar in the church to its patron, and by 1886 some persons were beginning to grumble about having to pay for another feast. There was a feeling of 'you collect for your feast, and we'll collect for ours.'

In 1888 an incident occurred which changed the course of the rivalry between the supporters of the two saints, which until then appears to have been rather mild. Dun Rokku, who was the procurator of the parish church, tried to increase the rent on some of the local property it owned. There was an outcry, and some persons went to the Bishop to complain that not only had Dun Rokku been diverting parish funds to buy new street decorations for the feast of St. Roque, but he was also raising rents to continue this work. The complaints resulted in an investigation, following which the procura of the church was taken from Dun Rokku and given to a prominent member of the village, who favoured St. Martin. This action, not surprisingly, infuriated Dun Rokku. From that day onward, so the accounts relate, he threw his full support openly behind the feast of St. Roque.

Some time after this, the partiti each formed their own social clubs. According to St. Martin supporters, their club grew out of a pre-existing band club, but that of their rivals was not established until after the First World War. They thus consider that they have seniority. St. Roque partisans, on the other hand, deny this seniority. They maintain that both clubs came into being out of the former club around the turn of the century. Consequently they have equal seniority. However, both clubs claim that the records crucial to the question of seniority were destroyed by enemy action during the last war. There is thus no documentary evidence for either claim, a fact which makes for deadlock whenever the issue of seniority is raised.

Dun Rokku was a strongminded priest, and he ruled the village for fifty-six years. When he finally died in 1932 at the age of 90, he was blind and deaf. During his many years in the parish he did much to beautify the church. Unfortunately, so people recount, he also introduced the hated partiti that divided the village. Through a variety of means at the disposal of a parish priest, he succeeded in wooing or coercing three-fourths of the village into his partit. There are many stories about the old man and the methods he used to recruit supporters. One is that he would make it difficult for people to marry unless they were, or became, members of the

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578 621 79 Confraternity of St. Roque. Unfortunately, at this point, it is not possible to distinguish fact from myth. The tales are accepted as reality, and so help to formulate the attitude of St. Martin supporters toward their rivals. However, when the old priest died, it was discovered that most of the festal finery of the parish church had been purchased in the name of the Confraternity of St. Roque. St. Martin supporters were in the humiliating position of having to beg their rivals for the use of the church valuables in order to decorate the church for the feast of the parish patron. Moreover, while the old priest had controlled the celebration of St. Martin, he had allowed the lay leaders of the St. Roque partit a free hand in planning their feast.

578 621 665 At this time the St. Martin club was split over national politics, and a faction composed of Strickland supporters left and founded a new club. Though both clubs remained loyal to St. Martin, there was trouble between them. Older St. Roque partisans recount with amusement how a report to the police by the secretary of the parent club resulted in twenty members of the new club being arrested and fined for gambling. But the hostility between these two factions declined when Strickland made his peace with the Church, and in 1934 they reunited.

578 621 713 714 The burden of redressing the balance between the partiti fell upon the old priest's successor, and upon those who followed him. There were many incidents between these priests and the St. Roque partit, and on several occasions the former had to send for police protection. In spite of the 1935 regulations, the St. Roque partit retained its numerical superiority as well as the church decorations during the 'thirties. It was not until 1942 that a shrewd parish priest succeeded in bringing the silver altar front out of the St. Roque strongroom into that of the parish church, where it has remained ever since.

The rivalry between the partiti lay dormant during the Second World War, as the people united to fight for survival. But it flared up again immediately after the war, as did similar rivalry in other villages. Both clubs organized musical bands for the first time. After a series of incidents which culminated in the parish priest again having to send for police protection, this time against angry St. Martin supporters, the rivalry began to decline somewhat. This decline was brought about chiefly by the effects of emigration, improvements in local transport, the establishment of a number

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to it, their rivals invariably stage their own fair or, and this is more usual, hire several buses and noisily leave the village for a picnic or a pilgrimage to some shrine of their saint. Many other incidents divide groups and associations along partit lines. For example, a former head teacher of the Farrug school told me that he had once tried to get the girls to wear the dark blue hair ribbons which are supposed to be part of their school uniforms. He was astounded when half the girls flatly refused. It was then explained to him that blue is the colour of the St. Roque partit, so the St. Martin girls could not be expected to wear it.

Let us now look at some of the major skirmishes which have taken place in Farrug during the last ten years. During 1952 and 1953 there was a dispute over an attempt by the St. Roque procession to pass along a street over which St. Martin's followers claimed exclusive rights. When the inexperienced new parish priest backed the St. Roque claim before the Archbishop, he brought violently into the open a dispute over which his predecessor had successfully procrastinated for years. The followers of St. Martin not only refused to celebrate their feast, but also succeeded in frightening the unfortunate priest rather badly by exploding a huge rocket in the drainpipe under his house. Some St. Martin partisans gleefully recounted to me that the priest was soon transferred to another parish, and that during his last week in Farrug he had asked the police to escort him between his house and the church. Relations between the Church and the St. Martin partit were restored when the Archbishop modified the St. Roque procession route.

In 1956 the St. Martin Band Club refused to celebrate the titular festa because the Archbishop had given the Confraternity of St. Roque permission to renew the four bunches of artificial flowers which decorate the main altar during his feast. The following year the St. Roque Band Club refused to play at the installation ceremony of the new parish priest because the Curia had just turned down the confraternity's request for permission to hang a new picture over its altar. In 1960 the same priest angered the St. Roque partit by refusing to let it participate in the St. Martin centenary celebrations. The poor man's hands were tied, for the St. Martin club had declared that it would have nothing to do with the feast if its rival took any part in it. At the moment, there is another struggle in the offing. The Confraternity of St. Roque

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578 621 79 recently petitioned the Archbishop for permission to renew the platform on which their saint stands during the feast. St. Martin supporters have threatened to cancel their feast if permission is granted, as it probably will be, for the present platform is old and falling to pieces.

575 578 621 793 While I was in the village, there was also a dispute over precedence between the two band clubs on the occasion of the installation ceremony of Dun Frangisk, the present parish priest. This is a good example of a dispute over precedence, and it is one which recurs in some form every time a new parish priest is appointed to a village where there are two band clubs. The band which has precedence has the right to march last and to escort the priest from the church to his house after the ceremony. The other club escorts him from his house to the church before the ceremony. Quite straightforward, but clubs rarely agree on which one has precedence. The dispute thus presents a knotty problem that brings a new priest abruptly up against the realities of parish politics within a few days after his arrival. His handling of the matter may well govern his relations with the partiti during the rest of his time in the village.

On the evening when Dun Frangisk moved into the parish, the St. Martin Band Club gave a party to welcome him and to bid farewell to his predecessor, who had been its strong ally. The party was a great success. The departing priest received a huge coloured portrait of St. Martin as a farewell gift, and Dun Frangisk met all the St. Martin leaders and blessed the club's new television set. A few days later, the St. Martin leaders called on the new priest and offered to provide a musical escort to and from the church for his installation ceremony. This was to be followed by a concert in the square and a firework display. The offer pleased him and he accepted. During the next few days the St. Martin club went about collecting the £25 the band programme would cost, thus advising the village of its plans.

Until then Dun Frangisk had heard nothing from the St. Roque club, a fact which rather disturbed him.

Two days later he called in person at both clubs to invite them to attend his installation ceremony and the reception following it. But he found the clubs deserted. The members of the St. Martin committee were away offering their congratulations to the old parish priest, who that night was holding his installation ceremony

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festa partit form the nucleus of his political following. It is not surprising therefore that he should support the party they favour. 575 621

There is another interesting way in which festa partiti in general, and secondary partiti in particular, are related to support for the Labour Party. In all villages divided by these partiti, people have become conditioned to opposing the authority of the Church in connection with matters dealing with the celebration of feasts. This, I suggest, has enabled them to accept the anti-clerical outlook of the Labour Party more easily than the people of villages not so divided. An old stone-cutter in Kortin, who was procurator of one of the small chapels in the village, once unconsciously pointed to the structural similarity of the MLP and secondary festa partiti. We were discussing the resemblance of the Strickland crisis of thirty years ago to the present political dispute, when he pointed to the parish church and remarked, 'I've always been against them. I was for Strickland. I'm for Mintoff, and if we had partiti here, I would support the secondary feast.' There is, of course, a difference between the opposition of a secondary partit and that of the MLP. Nonetheless, both oppose the authority of the Church and both resort to attacks on the clergy to drive home their points of view. This is anti-clericalism. Both the festa partiti and the Labour Party make a distinction between the person and the office of the cleric they attack, and they appear to attack the former rather than the latter. But repeated attacks upon the person holding an office may weaken the office itself. Thus prolonged anti-clericalism can lead to anti-religious sentiment, or at least prepare the way for it. This, I feel, has happened in the case of the festa partiti. 621 665 621 578 665 795

In challenging the decisions of the Church relating to matters of festa policy a festa partisan often resorts to violence. He frightens the priest with home-made bombs to show his displeasure, to try and change the decision and even to compel him to leave the village. But he never attacks the ultimate right of the Church or its ministers to make those decisions. Indeed, some friends in Farrug were quite shocked when I suggested that they were doing just this. On the other hand, this constant rebellion against the authority of the Church has accustomed people to being at odds for long periods with their parish priests as well as with the Archbishop. During these times, they often ignore what the Church has to say if it does not agree with the point of view they 578 621 79 [626]

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hold. This is the accepted pattern of behaviour, not only in villages divided by festa partiti, but also in others which have disputes with the Church. But it is only in the villages with festa partiti that these disputes, and the related anti-clerical action, take place on a regularly recurring basis. In these villages, though people are devout in observing many details of their religion, constant opposition to the parish priest in matters connected with festas has led them to look upon a measure of anti-clericalism as part of their way of life.

The relative lack of respect for the clergy in these villages has been partly responsible for a rather high turnover of parish priests. It has been shown how uncomfortable festa partiti can make the life of a parish priest. This, plus the meagre living in the smaller parishes, prompts priests to look for openings in wealthier and less troublesome villages. The Church itself regards the small rural parishes as training or 'stepping-stone parishes', as a monsignor from the Curia once described them to me. But even as such, they are unpopular, and the Archbishop often has difficulty finding priests willing to take charge of them. Farrug, for example, has had six parish priests since 1953. The lack of continuity of Church leadership in these small, divided villages has tended to weaken its influence there and to foster a lack of respect for its authority.

In this social climate the anti-clericalism of the Labour Party fits without great difficulty. Labour supporters have already had experience as festa partisans in ignoring the commands of the Church, and in enduring the taunts and disapproval of their rivals in the other partit. For them anti-clericalism is nothing new, and they are thus not as vulnerable to public opinion and the sanctions of the Church as persons in villages which do not have this tradition of opposition to the Church.

But if there is a certain similarity between the anti-clerical behaviour of many festa enthusiasts and that of MLP supporters, most persons make a distinction between the two. The anti-clerical actions of the festa partiti are usually directed against particular clerics in connection with specific decisions. In contrast, the anti-clericalism of the Labour Party is directed at the Archbishop in particular and often at all priests in general. This difference stems from the fact that basically their challenge to the authority of the Church differs significantly. Where the festa partisan does